

Board of Selectmen review Board of Education Budget
February 11, 2015

Present: First Selectman Gayle Weinstein; Selectman David Muller; Selectman Dennis Tracey; Town Administrator Tom Landry; Administrative Assistant Randi Derene; Superintendent Dr. Colleen Palmer; Chairman Board of Education Phil Schaefer, Members of the Board of Education, School Administrators; Weston residents

Finance Director Dr. Joann Keating was not present

This meeting was recorded and videotaped. The tapes are available in the Selectmen's office. The meetings are available for viewing online via the Town's website.

Ms. Weinstein called the meeting to order at 7:30pm

Pledge of Allegiance- Ms. Weinstein led the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance

Board of Selectmen review Board of Education Budget- Dr. Colleen Palmer and Phil Schaefer

Mr. Schaefer stated that keeping in mind the issue of declining enrollment, the school administration worked very hard on trying to keep the numbers down in this budget.

Mr. Muller thought the trend line is apparent and appreciated. We are looking at diminishing rates of growth, with a thoughtful approach in terms of the enrollment forecast. He commends the BOE for a thorough presentation.

Ms. Weinstein was excited by some of the proposals in this year's budget. Virtual learning, blended learning, and more technology into the school district. The big question is how we handle and manage that. Ms. Weinstein thanked Mr. Erik Haakenson for all the help that he has done on the town side with potentially contracting out our IT services to the BOE. She also thanks Kosta for all his help as well, as he has been very responsive to town employees.

The BOS begins their review of the BOE budget:

Introduction: No Comment

Superintendent's Executive Overview: Mr. Muller asked about some numbers that don't sync on Page 16-17. Dr. Palmer stated she will review this with Dr. Keating and verify the correct number. Ms. Weinstein asked about page 18, Employee Benefits MERS, asks about a decrease of \$21,000. Dr. Palmer said there was an update number given based on information from the Town Administrator. Dr. Keating will review this and confirm the Employee Benefits MERS contribution.

Mr. Tracey asks about the change in budget request from 3.17% to 2.92%. Dr. Palmer said it comes down to the technology configuration which brought about savings. With Mr. Haakenson's departure, they can hire one person to handle both the Informational Technology as well as the Educational Technology.

Hurlbutt Elementary School:

One general question that Ms. Weinstein had is regarding the co-team leaders (for both Hurlbutt and WIS). Why the need for 2 team leaders for 7 teachers? Dr. Palmer replied

that the district has the right to have 1 or 2(co) team leaders, according to the Union contract. Depending on enrollment next year, we may only need 1 team leader. This level of support for our teachers has proven to be successful. Team leaders meet before or after school with the principal, and get together with other team leaders.

Ms. Weinstein asked about PBIS, and wanted to know if is this the first year we are having coaches added to the budget? Dr. Palmer said this is the first year we are having one paid coach in each of the schools. The State requirements have impacted the workload of our schools administrators.

Mr. Muller asked if the decreased enrollment is impacting some of the specials, and why is it limited to only certain classes.. Dr. Palmer responds why certain specials were reduced and other weren't based on looking at need of each one.

Dr. Palmer also explained to Mr. Muller that there is an increase for certified reading specialist teachers, but a reduction in the reading para-professionals.

Mr. Tracey asked about declining enrollment...He sees great effort in adjusting staffing, but asks if we need to change our number of administrators. Dr. Palmer explains that they have already changed the Hurlbutt assistant principal to a PT position...If enrollment declines further, they would eliminate that position. Other staff adjustments would be made as needed, but Dr. Palmer does not feel they are over staffed at this time.

WIS: Mr. Tracey asked to clarify Research Based Literacy interventions. Dr. Palmer explained they are looking to increase the certified literacy staff members at WIS as they did at Hurlbutt.

Weston Middle School:

FACS (Family and Consumer Science) will be removed and being replaced by S.T.E.M. inquiry based classes.

Ms. Weinstein questioned the number of activities and stipends that we have. Why are activities continued to be funded in addition to the stipends if they are not going to be continued? Ms. Watkins replied that she wants the flexibility to have additional stipends so that they can be moved around depending on programs requests. Some programs don't take off and others are introduced. Clubs and Activities are in constant flux. Mr. Tracey makes a point that if they think a club is not going to run the following year that money should not be put in the budget. Ms. Weinstein wanted to make sure that money that doesn't need to be used is not allocated. Every \$25,000 saved means our mill rate can be reduced by a penny.

Weston High School:

Ms. Weinstein is very pleased that AP Latin is being offered and very happy to hear that there will be additional staff at the High School to deal with overcrowding in the classrooms.

Regarding all four schools – Ms. Weinstein is pleased to see additional student support in all schools for reading intervention, writing help and math help.

Mr. Muller questioned the decision to remove geophysical science, a CAPT subject area, and change to a lab based science program. Dr. Palmer states that rather than teach to the CAPT test, we are focusing on being more forward thinking ... lab sciences speak higher on college applications than results of these CAPT tests.

Mr. Muller also questioned why on page 86, why is the parking fee showing up as an expense. Dr. Palmer says it comes in as revenue, so she says she will ask Dr. Keating to clarify.

Ms. Weinstein asked again about the stipends in the high school – p. 89, noticing some clubs have an advisor who is volunteering, vs. other advisors who are getting paid a stipend. Dr. Palmer explained that when a club is first introduced, the advisor does not earn a stipend until it is proven to be a club that is sustainable.

Ms. Weinstein also questioned the amount of stipends budgeted for the High School theatre performances. All the levels of adult support are explained.

The activity fees for theatre productions – facility fees – why isn't there something similar to the fees charged to families of students participating in sports. The facilities committee has a proposal for fees for theatre students. Ms. Weinstein also asks about ticket sales. Why isn't there an offset for the ticket sales? A resident who is involved in the theatre productions states that the sales of the tickets are offsetting the costs of putting on the production. Ms. Weinstein said it would be helpful to see that written out.

Athletics:

Mr. Muller asked about the family cap of \$300 which might get raised slightly due to an increase in facility fees. Mr. Muller then refers to p. 93 looking for an explanation on "Unified Sports". He also questioned the revenue impact on having lighting available for out of district use of the facilities. Dr. Palmer responds that there is no increase due to the security that needs to be hired for these events. Lois Pernice, Director of Special Education, gave a description of Unified Sports, which is a program run through Special Olympics. Each student on a team has a regular education student as a mentor and a coach. They play other teams in other districts. It was a very positive program that will be continued.

P.94 and p.95, Dr. Muller questioned the exact same dollar amount on supplies - Dr. Palmer said that Mark Berkowitz, Athletic Director does a great job managing supplies and keeping costs down. Ms. Weinstein suggested that usage should be tracked so we have an idea of each sport. Also sports participation needs to be looked at, with gymnastics being of particular concern.

Special Education: Lois Pernice, Director of Pupil/Personnel Services

Ms. Weinstein asked about the budget number about two unknown placements and two anticipated agreements. Why is this number the same every year? Ms. Pernice said there some students that they don't know how pending mediation will turn out, so the allowance of 2 students serves them well. .

Ms. Weinstein brought up a discussion of the new in-house program that they want to bring forward, Effective School Solutions. This is a program that would allow the schools to bring back students that are currently outplaced due to significant emotional difficulties that keep them from learning successfully. Staff would be brought in for individual therapy, group therapy, and family therapy. Students who are referred for this program would be assessed to see if the student would be appropriate for the program. Goal is for students to be able to stay in our schools and get a higher level of education. This program has been successful run in a school in New Jersey. Mr. Tracey confirmed this is a program we would contract with, and they proved the resources. We would

have two staff members for up to 18 students. This program can help students who are at “at risk” as well. Early intervention, safety net on site.

Ms. Weinstein stated that she is a little surprised that we have reached a critical mass of students that we are looking to bringing a program like this in house, but on the other hand, if we have students that are in need of such a program, she is glad that we are addressing it. She doesn’t see that offsetting the cost of this program in this budget. If there is savings from outplacements, that should be shown as an offset against cost. Mr. Schaeffer said it’s a tricky area to talk about. Dr. Palmer says that there are some families that will keep their child where they are, not coming back to the district. And other families that are unsure. So there will be a transition time until they start seeing more of these students kept in house. It might take a year or two to see financial benefit. Ms. Weinstein suggested that they start asking parents if they would be interested in this program before they present this budget to the BOF They only need one student who is interested, and that would create an total offset in their budget.

Mr. Muller asked how long we need to run this program to see if it will be cost effective... 2 years? 5 years? Mr. Shaeffer replied it certainly would need a few years to see effectiveness. Ms. Weinstein wanted to know that given the cost of the program, which at \$70,000 should there be a cost vs. benefit analysis done to see if it is worth it. Dr. Palmer added that she thinks the program is more than \$70,000. Ms. Weinstein reminded Dr. Palmer that they only allocated \$70,000. Lois Pernice clarified that was an additional anticipated increase in the budget that they were not going to is able to offset by bringing students back into the district. The savings from MERS was moved into the Special Education budget and is going towards this program. Mr. Tracey asked about t the total program cost. Ms. Pernice stated it costs around \$260,000. Mr. Tracey also thought, like Ms. Weinstein, thought that the program cost \$67,000.

Mr. Tracey pointed out that the statement in the BOE Budget book is misleading “ As a starting point we have allocated \$67,000 in the budget for the program” Dr. Palmer said that if this wasn’t communicated appropriately, they will highlight that in a different way. She wanted to make it clear that funds that would have been used for outplacement, would be applied towards this internal in-house program. Mr. Muller clarifies the \$200,000 differential is the cost recouped from bringing students back into the district. Ms. Pernice stated that this is still in planning stages and they still need to have conversations with families.

Ms. Weinstein asked Ms. Pernice about the \$10,000 budgeted for the drug and alcohol testing. She read that the bulk of this amount is going towards teacher training or guidance counselor training, so why wasn’t put in the professional development budget? She was then told it was going towards drug testing so kids who were asked to leave for drug related issues can get back to school sooner. Ms. Pernice clarified that it would cover a combination of the two. Ms. Weinstein asked if perhaps the budget could be reduced since all the guidance counselors have already received this specific training.

Pupil Personnel Services:

Mr. Muller asked about an expense for \$8000 for test administration. Is this a cost of having the test in Weston, and is there no reimbursement? Ms. Pernice replied that the \$8000 is for the two tests (PSAT and SAT) and it is for the offset for the people that monitor the testing. Dr. Palmer added that there is some offset from the fees that the

students pay to take these tests, but it still costs the town money. She will get the breakdown for the BOS. Dr. Palmer adds that for the PSAT, because we offer this test during school, the school absorbs the fees for the students.

Ms. Pernice wanted to state on record that there was no intent to hide information regarding the ESS (Effective School Solutions). She said that there was some available funding to put towards this program, but it is very sensitive in terms of talking to the families. There haven't been any conversations yet. Ms. Weinstein just wanted to be clear: it was very misleading to give the impression that the total program cost is \$67,000 when in fact it costs \$260,000. Mr. Tracey added that their budget books should be changed. Dr. Palmer will make sure this program is communicated clearly going forward.

Ms. Weinstein stated that Speaker of the House Sharkey said that he is very intent on regionalizing special education and putting all of Special Ed under the RESC umbrella. And if the schools choose not to participate, then you may be putting your excess costs funding in jeopardy. How does this program have an impact on what they are talking about on the state level regarding special education? Dr. Palmer responded that what concerns her about a "one size fits all" approach is it doesn't take into account what is best for the children. Financially it will hurt the town.

Curriculum and Instructional Improvement

Mr. Muller questioned if more and more textbooks are available online, why are we spending so much money on books? Dr. Palmer explained that the publishers have changed their pricing policies, and are allowing you to buy the electronic version, but for a slightly higher price you can get the digital and hard copy. So, we end up spending the same amount of money for the eBook as for a hard copy. Dr. Craw explained that the price of books in this budget has gone up 11% because, of the selection of books that are required for next year. Communications going up 18% as a result of a reduction in the federal funding of e-rate

Consulting services... If we have a director of digital learning, why do we need additional training for staff? Don't we have technology integrators to help with that? Dr. Palmer said we can look further into this as we haven't yet hired the new director of digital learning.

Technology:

Mr. Muller asked about the license payments. Mr. Haakenson explained how the payment models for each license works, and how it is more cost effective to have a building license rather than a district license. Ms. Weinstein asks if anyone is monitoring the use of all the various software... Mr. Haakenson confirmed. She also questioned the administrative software, Mr. Haakenson explained that they all have different functions and are all needed. Dr. Palmer added that the district has a master planning team put into place to review all of the data resources that have been allocated and make sure they make a difference.

Ms. Weinstein mentioned that she is excited with the direction that the district is moving in, with more digital learning. The BOE will be hiring a new Director of Technology and Digital Learning and Innovation, and Ms. Weinstein is concerned about increasing the technology integrators in all of the schools without knowing what direction this new

hire will want to go. (p.120) – Dr. Palmer said it's not just about hiring one person, it's more of a mindset for our district- looking at a major shift, being at the forefront of using digital tools. Both for our students and our staff. They are defining standards of what teachers need to know.

Ms. Weinstein also questioned the tremendous amount of computers requested in this year's budget. Last year 206 Chromebooks were requested for the smarter balance testing. We have 2225 computers in the district. After the old ones were removed we had 1800-1900 total computers in the district. This year, they are requesting 630 Chromebooks, district wide. Mr. Haakenson explained the need for these new Chromebooks, including great functionality as well as some of the equipment has aged out. About 400 laptops need to be replaced (that are 5-6 years old). They also applied for a technology grant that would cover the wireless expenses. Students will be encouraged to bring their own devices. Dr. Palmer explained one of the big reasons for ordering these devices is so when there is testing going on school-wide, teachers in our classes will still have access to devices.

Mr. Tracey asked if students can use their own devices to take these tests? Dr. Palmer said that during testing, it would be easier and less time consuming if each student has their own identical device, provided by the school...Problems arise if each student has their own device.

420 HP Laptops is what will be phased out..(they are 5-6 years old).

District Administrative Services

Mr. Muller asked (p.129) about the dues and fees. He wants to make sure they are all necessary. Dr. Palmer confirmed.

Facilities: Joe Olenik

Mr. Muller questioned p.135; increases in contractual services. Mr. Olenik stated that they have contacted each service and they each have an increase in contracts. Ms. Weinstein questioned why we need to start removing excess emergency lights at a cost of \$15,000. Mr. Olenik replied that the schools have emergency generators, so you don't need the lights anymore...By removing them, we save on the annual service contract. Increased allocation for tree trimming service. There are trees that are rotted (in the courtyards, on school campus) that need to be taken down to prevent them falling on someone. Increase allocation for locks and keys. (\$1000 over original budget) – there are some schools that are not fully on grand master key, so we want to correct that. p.133 Cost sharing parks and rec – the number we were given by JoAnn was \$36,710, not \$35,590 – Ms. Weinstein asked for the breakdown of electricity, oil and gas, Mr. Olenik will follow up with Dr. Keating. Increases seem high compared to what we are budgeting.

Mr. Muller asked Ms. Weinstein, when we budget for the town both snow plowing and paving, is there no cost efficiency to having one allocation that having it done separately (one through the town and one through the schools)? The town does not plow the parking lots, just School Road, as we don't have the man power.. The school now has their own plow, donated to them from the Town, to take care of the parking lots.

Ms. Weinstein questioned the maintenance projects.. p. 136

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Hot Water Warrantee WIS put that in Sept 2005 – 8-10 year warrantee, Mr. Shaefer will look into that.

Repairing the indoor bleachers at the Middle School – there will be two primaries this summer – so before this is scheduled, they should coordinate with the registrars.

Ventilation in the high school team rooms – Ventilation was never completed. This needs to be fixed.

Bleachers.. Struts and motors need to be repaired. Mr. Olenik wants to bring in certified contractors.

Charging Stations: \$1500 – is this something that the PTO would be willing to pay for? Dr. Palmer said it could be discussed. This is an estimated cost by doing a walkthrough with electrician.
work.

Capital: The requested wooden guide rail on School Road doesn't meet the requirements for the Town capital budget as it needs to be over \$10,000 and have a useful life of 10 years.

Oil Tank replacements- In the proposal, it was for the tanks at North House and East House. In the budget book it says South House and East house. Mr. Olenik confirmed it is North House and East House. There is a contingency of \$99,000 – Ms. Weinstein suggested to put money into a designated sinking fund instead of tying up almost \$100,000. Ms. Weinstein asked Dr. Palmer to find out the insurance deductible of we find we have a spill.

Pool Dehumidification: Mr. Olenik sent info to Mr. Jack Davidoff. Need to work out changes.

North and South House courtyard revitalization: Ms. Weinstein just wanted to clarify that this was additional work, not the same project twice as it is listed in tier one and tier two. Dr. Palmer clarified that this year they will repair the North and next year the South courtyard.

Ms. Weinstein suggested that they repair the visitor side bleachers now to ensure they are safe.

Mr. Tracey questioned \$800,000 for air conditioning. It was clarified that it is a request for next year. The only A/C that is being done this year, in Tier One, is for the HS gymnasium.

Ms Weinstein reviewed that the Capital Budget items for the BOE are: Oil Tank replacement, the controls on UV/AV wing of WMS, domestic hot water heater replacement in pool, pool dehumidification, AC for the High School, North courtyard revitalization, science wing gas leak remediation, repair the visitor side bleachers and stadium, skid steer and infield groomer.

District Wide: Ms. Weinstein said that she will send an email to Dr. Palmer with more questions, as they are more for Dr. Keating.

Internal Services Fund: no questions

Revenue Report: no questions

Special Revenue Grants: no questions

Supplemental schedules and information: no questions

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Meeting adjourned: 10:27pm

Respectfully submitted,

Randi Derene
Administrative Assistant

Approved: 5/7/15